

Land of the Quinault

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> Photographs by Larry Workman unless noted

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The text of this book is set in **English Times**. This type has not changed since it was first used hundreds of years ago and is as popular and recognizable today as it was in 1855.

Quinault woman on beach with Razor clam basket, 1912.
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Although it strains our modern sensibilities, the psychology that underlay the head flattening is a hurdle we must surmount to understand the old Northwest Coast culture for what it was. We do not now believe in compressing the head, for the brain is thought to be the most important route to success and happiness, although we do let it soak in all manner of intellectual contaminants that the ancient Northwest Coast cultures with their richness of language, song, myth, and ceremonial would have considered passive and slave-like. An active person on the Northwest Coast spent his life in vigorous self-assertion, and in a constant stream of creative acts performed virtually every day.

Let us once more consult Ronald Olson for traditional Quinault information on the

subject of head flattening:

Every child of good birth had its head flattened. Persons with undeformed heads were called *kwico'sos* (flea face) and were thought to be mentally inferior. Only orphans or the children of ne'er-do-wells grew up with heads not flattened. There was no rule against the flattening of the heads of slave children. [But it is unlikely that slave mothers had much time for flattening the heads of their infants.] The flattening was done as follows: A bundle of shredded cedar bark or ashes wrapped inside cloth was shaped like a small pillow, placed on the forehead and lashed tightly in place by thongs tied to the sides of the cradle. The pad for flattening was applied within a few days of birth. The lashings were tightened from time to time and the process lasted over a period of months. While the head was being flattened, the child was always carried in the cradle. This was a troughlike affair some thirty inches long hollowed out of red cedar. The inside was padded with shredded cedar bark which served as both mattress and diaper. Holes in the bottom served for drainage...The cradle was carried on the mother's breast by means of a carrying strap which passed around the neck. ⁵⁷

It is not often noticed that the people of the Northwest appreciated the beauties of unadorned nature. It is obvious from their art that this was so, but the connection is not always made because of our ignorance and insufficient exposure to it. In some of the autobiographical texts that Olson preserved for us, we can see much sensitivity. A couple

of examples may suffice:

Once when I was very ill I dreamed of a beautiful valley full of flowers. I wanted to go down there, but Grasshopper warned me not to. If I had gone there, I would

have died.58

She [a shaman] returned the soul to the sick man, who shortly recovered. He told of all that he had seen in the other world. He saw a beach on which strutted a flock of noisy gulls. The surf has a different sound from the surf of this world. It was a pretty place and he hoped that no one would come after his soul. The next year he really died, because he liked the land of the dead.⁵⁹

The Uses of Plants

A varied glimpse into the tangible side of the old Quinault life can be obtained from a procession through their uses of plants. This can be done mainly with the entries on the Quinault found in Erna Gunther's *Ethnobotany of Western Washington*, published in 1945. She found more plant lore among the Quinault than with any other tribe of western Washington. Yet it is a relative richness, not an absolute one, for the list is really rudimentary compared to what it could have been if recorded a hundred years before. It was richer than the surviving knowledge from the other tribes because, for one thing, there was Olson's ethnography to use, and, secondly, because Gunther and her assistant, Roger Ernesti, could find more Quinault informants than those of any other tribe. Despite the gaps, the list goes as follows, with some rearrangements for improving its readability. The Quinault words that follow the English are from either Gunther, Quinault Horton Capoeman, or included in the Quinault Dictionary.⁶⁰

The Quinaults used various ferns (*Pla'pla*) for lining and covering storage baskets of food, for wiping the slime from fish, and for covering food in cooking baskets. Licorice fern (*Sumana'amats*) was used as a cough medicine. Sword fern (*Chitwashnits*) rhizomes were baked in a pit of hot rocks. They were covered over with sword fern leaves and sand, and another fire was built on top. Roots of the sword fern were boiled to make a hair rinse

that cured dandruff and the spore sacs were good for healing burns. Rhizomes of lady fern (Kuwa. lsa) were served mixed with salmon eggs. Maidenhair fern (Ha.pal.pulth) was used to decorate baskets, and the ash was used as a shampoo. (Here is an important hint about how people got their hair clean without soap—with ashes.) The mealy centers of the rhizomes of braken fern (Tsumxe'xnix) were roasted in ashes, and the fibers were made into string. The leaves of deer fern (Skae'etskl'o) enclosed baking camas, and the young leaves were chewed raw for colic.

Peeled shoots of the field horsetail (*Telo'ts*) were eaten raw in the spring as a relief from the dried food of winter. The root was also eaten with whale or seal oil. The common scouring-rush (*Moxwin*), another horsetail, was used as an abrasive to polish arrow shafts, and its stems were boiled with willow leaves for girls with irregular menstrual periods. And juice of the roots of the giant horsetail (also *Telop'ts*) was mixed with human milk and applied as an eyewash.

Pacific yew (*Tse'e'kak*) was extremely valuable for making bows, arrows, and canoe paddles. The shafts of salmon, seal, and porpoise harpoons were of yew, as were the frames of dipnets, canoe bailers, clubs for killing sea-lions and fur seals, digging sticks for roots and clams, wedges for splitting logs, spoons, and the springs of deer traps. The Quinaults chewed yew leaves and spit them on wounds, which made them sting. They also boiled the dried bark to make a lung medicine; which reminds one of the recent discovery that yew bark contains a drug effective against cancer. Perhaps the lung cancers from smoky houses were what the Quinaults were treating.

The bark of the white pine (Ta'tskanil) was boiled for a drink that cured disorders of the stomach and purified the blood. The pitch of lodgepole pine (Tatnixlo) was put on open sores, and it was also chewed for sore throat, while the pitch of sitka spruce (Sulu'x) was chewed for pleasure. Spruce roots were made into baskets and rain hats, and they also found employment in tying on the tines of salmon spears, and in lacing the corners of bentwood boxes. Limbs were used for whaling ropes, to tie the parts of houses together, as with the planks of walls to each other and to the posts and purlins, and in tying on the crosspieces of canoes. Canoes were caulked with spruce pitch. A tea was made of spruce cambium, which was also chewed.

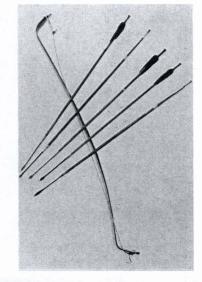
Bark of hemlock trees (*K'hwa'lp*) was mashed up with salmon eggs to make orange paint for dip nets and paddles. And the Quinaults also soaked the bark, shaped it, and sewed it to make linings for cooking pits, and to make storage containers for elderberries. Hemlock boughs made good temporary shelters for hunters. Young hemlock trees made useful canoe poles and catwalks along the tops of fishing weirs. The wood was also cut into combs. Ground hemlock bark mixed with pitch made a dark-brown face paint. The same was also applied to the chest of a child as a cold cure. Hemlock pitch was mixed with marrow from an elk tibia and rubbed on the eyebrows for the sake of beauty. The boiled bark made a laxative. The Quinault also braided hemlock and rubbed themselves with it while bathing during adolescent training. And they also filled small hollowed hemlock logs with sacred objects to bring on storms.

The pitch of Douglas-fir (*Dja'mats*) was chewed like gum. It was also applied to sores. The bark of this tree made a very good fuel when it had fallen from a dead tree. Torches were made of its pitchy wood. The wood was also fashioned into harpoons, salmon spear shafts, and the handles of dipnets. To make these shafts and handles, it was probably the slender poles found in dense fir thickets that were used, rather than interior pieces of large logs.

The wood of the Redcedar (*Chitem*) was the most widely used of all. It served as wall planks, house posts, roof planks, for the hulls of most types of river and ocean-going canoes, for boxes, cradles, and arrow shafts. The charcoal of cedar was mixed with salmon eggs to rub on canoe paddles to produce a lasting, shiny black color. The shredded bark of cedar was useful as padding for infants, for diapering, for towels, and napkins. It was plaited into skirts, capes, rain coats, and dresses for women. Rain hats were made of split cedar. Heavier grades of rope from twisted cedar limbs were used to tow killed whales to shore. Open-work baskets were also made from these limbs. Both the limbs and roots of cedar were used to sew the corners of wooden boxes. An infusion of the bark was made for kidney trouble and to wash sores.

From Myron Eells' notes, we take the following additional uses of cedar, learned from the Salish of Puget Sound, but applicable also to the Quinault: planks for burial enclosures, **Below:** Quinault yew wood bow and arrows. SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION COLLECTION.

Bottom: Ben and Frank Harlow carve four canoes from one cedar tree. Queets River, ca. 1920. COURTESY JOSEPH DELACRUZ, DALE NORTHUP, PHOTOGRAPHER.







Quinault Maggie Kelly in traditional redcedar dress, 1912. COURTESY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES, E. CURTIS COLLECTION, NN: 278

for rails, shingles, shakes, oars, baby boards, buoys, spinning wheels [meaning spindle-whorls], torches, fish traps, Tamahnous wands, firewood, mats, sails, infant head compressors, string, bailers, wadding for guns, head bands, blankets; and the gum and leaves were employed in medicine.⁶¹

To continue with Gunther, the broad-leaved cat-tail (Sgwitci) was a mainstay for manufacturing mats. These served as roofing, as mattresses, inner walls of plank houses, kneeling pads in canoes, and packsacks shaped like large wallets. A light-weight basket was made from cat-tails. The roots were eaten.

The stems of tule were made into packs and coarse baskets. The leaves of rye-grass (*Kakeput*) were placed beneath drying salal berries, and they were braided into tumplines. The white part of the below-ground stalk of skunk cabbage (*Tsule'los* or *Takwakienks*) was eaten after roasting on hot rocks. The root of this plant could be boiled to concoct a remedy that was drunk to clean out the bladder; the leaves were used as a general poultice.

Pine lily or beargrass (*K'ula'lstap*) was very important for the manufacture of baskets. A very poisonous plant, false hellebore (*Tciai'nix*) was boiled for drinking in small quantities to cure rheumatism. Nodding onion, found at Lake Quinault, was an important food. Camas (*Molakels* or *Kailk*), which grew at Baker's, Cook, and O'Took prairies, was an important staff of life. It had to be cooked to become nutritious. Tiger lilies (*K'laka'*), another member of this important family, were gathered for eating in the same prairies. The roots of wild lily-of-the-valley or snakeberry (*Kleqwan*) were pounded and soaked in water to make a medicine for sore eyes. If children picked trilliums (*Tcatca'olklus*), that would bring rain.

Cottonwood (*Kalle'tsaix* or *Quinouk*) trunks were used to make pickets for palisades around villages; the bark was used for roofing. The gum of the burls was considered to be an antiseptic for cuts and wounds, and to make an infusion to relieve tuberculosis. Hooker's or beach willow (*Laleah-kilech*) was twisted to make a heavy twine for tumplines and slings, and for sea-lion harpoon lines. Lures for halibut, sole, cod, and flounder were carved from this willow and it was also used as a fire drill.

Fire drills and canoe bailers were formed of alder (*Matus* or *Mos-key*), as were some canoe paddles. (Oregon ash was perhaps the principal wood used for paddles.) The bark was an important source of dye to make nets invisible to fish. Alder bark made lining for elderberry containers. Dishes, spoons, and platters were made of the wood. From Myron Eells we learn that alder also was important for fuel, for making masks, for building fish traps and rough houses. Medicine was made from the bark.⁶²

Returning to Gunther, we find that nettles (*Qwunen*) were stripped of their bark and the latter made into string. The stalks were used to whip people with paralysis (as a cure), and bark was boiled to make headache and nosebleed cures. Tips of the plant were chewed during labor.

Spring beauty or miners' lettuce (*Pepe'tcitsep*) was chewed during pregnancy to soften the baby for the birth. The roots of water lilies were heated and applied to painful places on the body. They were obtained a short way up the Quinault River. The leaves of baneberry (*Pa'maslm*) were chewed and spit on wounds received in warfare, and more recently for gunshot wounds. Leaves of the yellow avens were pulverized and rubbed into open cuts.

The roots of Oregon grape were concocted to a yellow dye. They were also boiled to make a cure for coughs and stomach disorders. Ocean spray or ironwood was manufactured into many tools and utensils, including fire tongs and digging sticks. The stems of the related spiraea were used to string clams for roasting. Rose hips were eaten and the twigs of roses were reduced to ashes to mix with skunk oil for application to sores. The common gooseberry (*Kleemwos*) was baked in cakes and dried like many other berries; it was sometimes mixed with elderberries and buried with them for preservation. Fresh thimbleberries (*Xe'e'nix*) were, of course, eaten, and the unripe berries could be stored in baskets. Thimbleberry leaves were used to line the elderberry storage baskets. (It is interesting to note the many methods employed to preserve elderberries.) The salmonberry (*K'wklaxnix* or *Klanits*) was a common fresh food and the Quinaults associated it with the Blueback salmon run. Roasted sprouts were eaten with dried salmon. The bark was boiled in sea water for a drink to lessen labor pains; it was also useful for cleaning infected wounds and burns. Wild strawberries (*Ts'xe'te'em* or *Scaithin*) were looked upon as a party food to be served to guests.

Wild cherry bark (Pile'la) could be useful for decorating the weave of baskets, and

to tie on the prongs of fish spears. Liquid from the boiled bark was drunk as a laxative—rotten cherry wood was mixed with water and drunk as a contraceptive. Oso berries or squaw plums were eaten fresh. Crab apples (*Qeitsunixlak*) were softened for eating by storing them in baskets. The bark was an important source of medicine. The late Blanche Shale McBride, a friend of the present author, used it to alleviate arthritis. An infusion of the bark made an eye wash, and it was drunk to cure any internal soreness. Infusions of Labrador or Indian tea were taken for rheumatism. Cascara bark (*Xwixwi'nil*) was a laxative, as it still is.

A Quinault husband who had deserted his wife could be brought back to his family with the giant vetch (*Manuxkuxtostp*)—the wife would rub herself with the roots, and then wrap them up and place them under her pillow. A deserted husband could take advantage of the same procedure. To make a man fall in love with her, a woman had only to cut a forked twig of false huckleberry and carry it, waving it in the air, and singing a special song.

Wilted wood-sorrel or oxalis (Qwoi'ets'stap) leaves were cooked with grease for eating. The roots were chewed and then squeezed into the eyes as medicine. The young stems of cow parsnip were dipped in seal oil before eating; the leaves were warmed and put on sore limbs. (Hikers still chew the sour, green apple leaf as a trail-side treat.)

For smoking salmon, dead broadleaf or big leaf maple (*Na'u Staap Malp*) wood was excellent. The cured wood was desirable for carving bowls, dishes, platters, and spoons. Myron Eells noted that maple was also useful in the form of hacklers (fiber shredders), mat blocks, paddles, bobbins, seine blocks, combs, fish and duck spear-heads, fish clubs, and rails. The leaves were used in steaming.⁶³ Returning again to Gunther, we find that vine maple (*Maxo'atcalnix*) was important for basketry; in fact, the Quinaults called it the 'basket-tree' (*Malp nitl*). Its long straight stems were made into openwork baskets for carrying firewood, clams, or fish. The wattleworks of fish traps were woven of this maple, and the poles were employed to hold down the planks of roofs. The charcoal was mixed with oil to make a black paint. Charcoal of Pacific dogwood was used for tattooing.

Salal berries (*Quasuchent*) were mashed and dried in cakes, which were then soaked to prepare them for eating; for that they were also dipped in whale or seal oil. Chewed salal leaves relieved heartburn and colic; if boiled, they made a diarrhoea remedy.

The cotton of Fireweed (*Popoxsa'dix*) was combined with duck feathers for weaving blankets, and its sugary pith was a candy. Scented bedstraw (a plant) was mashed and put in the hair for its pleasant odor. The leaves of kinnikinnick (*Kwica'*) were dried, pulver ized, and smoked. (Salal was probably also smoked—there was no tobacco grown in the vicinity.)

Evergreen huckleberries (*Naka'Itean*) were dried in the sun or in smoke, partly mashed, pressed into cakes, and wrapped in leaves or bark. Blue huckleberries (*Sk'iuxsnil*) and shotberries could be consumed fresh or dried. They would last for months if kept cool and dry. Red huckleberries (*to'xlumnix*) were eaten fresh, and the leaves were made into tea. Cranberries were picked at Spruce Orchard near Moclips, and stored in boxes or baskets until soft and brown.⁶⁴

Red elderberries (*K'lo'manix*) were steamed on rocks and put in containers that were stored underground or in cool water for later consumption in the winter. The bark of the plant was scraped and boiled. The milky liquid was put on a woman's breasts after childbirth to bring on a flow of milk. Pith was removed from inside the stem, and a plug inserted to make a whistle for calling elk. The bark was steeped to make an emetic tea to cause vomiting.

Leaves of the swamp honeysuckle or twinberry (Kaxa'hcilnix) were chewed during confinement. Hedge nettle or woundwort flowers (Qwadjudkolum) were picked for their nectar; the whole plant was used to cover steaming sprouts. Leaves of common coltsfoot (Qwai'ax) were placed over berries when cooking them in a pit. The root was mashed and soaked to make a wash for swellings and sore eyes. Roots of yarrow (Leko'stap) were boiled for a tuberculosis medicine, and to make another eyewash.

Bracket or shelf fungus (*T'owole*), the type seen on the trunks of trees, was believed to cause echoes—because it is shaped like an ear. Kelp (*K'otk'a'*) was used to make fish line, especially for halibut, sole, and cod. The bottle ends served as oil flasks. A leafy lichen (*Ts'o'o'tc*) was used to wipe salmon clean, in preference to water.

Bottom and beginning of sides of basket.
ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM
COLLECTION, GOTHENBURG,
SWEDEN



Quinault woman digging clams, 1890. COURTESY QUINAULT HISTORICAL FOUNDATION, E.H. BROWN ARTIST

The Varied Tasks of Men and Women

Apart from building materials, the world of plants was probably more intimately known by women than by men. Yet, even though there was division of labor, the sexes were usually together, as illustrated by the ethnologist Ram Raj Singh.

People from a village generally went together to dig camas and other roots. Each household erected a temporary hut where they stayed until they had secured the items that they wanted. The work was done on a family basis. Women dug the roots and the men sometimes helped them if the ground were hard. Women washed the roots and put them in baskets. Men hunted elk and deer on the prairies, and the women smoked the meat. Men peeled the bark off cedars; women dried it and kept it for spare time work in winter when dresses and other objects were made from it. Men made rope out of it.⁶⁵

On a spring evening a couple of hundred years ago, if one had stood on the upper edge of the wide beach south of Point Grenville, one might have seen a score or more cedar splint torches moving about over the glistening ripple marks of the beach near the foam of the low tide. They would have been held by men and older boys to illuminate the emergent necks of the thousands of razor clams underfoot.

The women and slaves, who dug them with deft prying movements of their digging sticks, would have been clothed in bulky cedar-bark skirts to the knees, cedar-bark capes, and topped by large, umbrella-like hats of the same. They would have been dragging or lifting large open-work bags amd baskets. By torchlight, they would have appeared a natural part of the scene, just another of the creatures that live around the edge of the sea. They would have been joking among themselves, and scolding the naked children running about. By day they might, from a distance, have looked like birds, some large species strutting about, bending over every few seconds to pick up a clam and toss it in a bag.

A general feeling of relaxation and anticipation might have prevailed since a large, if late, dinner of steamed clams was assured. Already, at the makeshift camp of mat leantos in the hollows between the small dunes at the edge of the spruce forest, boys were heating rocks in great bonfires. The clams that were not consumed that night would be smoked the next day, strung on long sharp sticks. There might, however, be a slight edge to their thoughts since a pair of strange canoes had been sighted the previous day. But the men and older boys all had their bows and clubs and long lances lying in readiness against giant, bleached driftwood logs.

In the unlikely event they were surprised, the women and children would know what to do: That was to head for the woods as fast as possible, not in a group, but scattering. The men would take their cue from the military leader of the group and advance to meet the marauders, who, seeing the preparations for defense, and the determination, would more than likely beat their retreat. For raiders seldom fought unless they had either surprise or over-whelming numbers on their side. On an evening such as we describe, at low tide, there would not have been much fear of what lay in the sea, for the surf formed a protective wall that no one would try in the dark.

In this vignette, we have made some assumptions about women's work contrasted to men's work that may be too rigid. These people were not automatons, they made decisions to handle changes in conditions. And sometimes men would do the shellfish gathering, as with mussels in the following illustration from a Quinault tale.

The youngest brother asked [the old man] to come out with them to gather shellfish from a certain rock in the sea. The old man made many excuses,— that he had no mat, nor paddle, nor any of the things necessary,—but they told him they had all those things in the canoe, and at last he consented and went out with them to the rock. They all climbed out and started to hunt for shellfish, and they put the old man to work on the farther side of the rock, where they told him the shellfish were large and plentiful; while the brothers worked on the side where the canoe was."66

We should remember, too, that the Spanish saw six grown boys gathering and eating shellfish at the cove south of Point Grenville in 1775.⁶⁷

We may divide life into various compartments, the economic ones for example, but for the ancient Quinaults, it seems as if every act of gaining their subsistence was weighted and embellished with some social corollary, activity, and meaning:

The people used to go out on the ocean to hunt ducks, and the best hunters among them were a young man and his sister. The young man would sit in the bow of the canoe and do the shooting, and the girl sat in the stern and did the paddling; and every evening they came back with a canoe-load of ducks, and gave to all the people in the village.⁶⁸

There are several examples in the folklore and oral history that show women doing the work of men, and doing it better. Consider an episode from "The Adventures of Bluejay," one of the Quinault tales collected by Livingston Farrand in the very beginning of our century: "Next morning at sunrise, the girls rose, and said they were going for roots, as usual; but, instead of doing so, they went down to their canoe, took off their women's clothes, and put on men's, painted their faces, and tied their hair up in knots on the backs of their heads." These two girls of Oyhut proceeded to prove themselves better hunters than the hundreds of other people in Gray's Harbor by shooting the Shining Duck that all had been after.⁶⁹

Fishing

Among the four species of salmon that ascended the Quinault, the chief was the Blueback. Naturally, the people had a story of how they came to enjoy this gift:

Just in front of them they saw the smoke of a large village [beyond the western horizon], and as they neared it saw that the smoke was of different colors, and

Spearing salmon at the mouth of the Quinault River, ca. 1885. COURTESY SPECIAL COLLECTION DIVISIONS, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES, SARAH WILLOUGHBY ARTIST, NN: NA-4042

